



Annual Report 2019-2020

Friends of the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park

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The Friends of the Wilderness Park is a grassroots organization that works with the City of Claremont to help preserve the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park as an environmental resource, manage the park for passive recreation, and minimize the impact of park attendance on surrounding residential neighborhoods.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Jim Pinter-Lucke, Chair and Signage Working Group leader

Charlie Gale, Second Saturday Water Coordinator

Nancy Hamlett, Treasurer and Invasive Plant Working Group leader

Meg Mathies, Communications and Secretary

Vicki Salazar, Volunteer Coordinator

Greg Glass, Non-profit Status Committee leader

Dean McHenry (March 2018 – December 2019), Trails Working Group co-leader

Shawn Winnick (June 2018 – September 2019), Trails Working Group co-leader



INTRODUCTION

Mission and History

The Friends of the Wilderness Park is a volunteer support group that was formed as a result of the *Master Plan for the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park* (Section IP 2.1 of the *Implementation Plan*). As described in that document, it was envisioned that the Friends would “assist with recruiting volunteers for various projects, engage with visitors on the trail to promote positive compliance with rules and trail courtesies, discuss issues of concern, share observations, and report to and coordinate with staff.”

The Friends was constituted in its present form in Spring 2018. In normal times, the Leadership Team meets monthly at the Alexander Hughes Community Center. Fred Cervantes, Parks & Sports Coordinator, serves as the City’s liaison to the Friends and has attended the Leadership Team meetings. The Friends have several working groups concerned with specific aspects of the Park.



Purpose this report

The *Implementation Plan* states that “In order to ensure the C&HS Commission is informed of CHWP issues, the ‘Friends’ will provide an Annual Report and Recommendations on user experience and park culture to the Parks, Hillside, and Utility Committee as well as the Community and Human Services Commission.” This report is submitted in response to that charge.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

A year curtailed...

Because of pandemic restrictions, including CHWP closure and a ban on group gatherings, the Friends were active only from July 2019 through February 2020. In that time, we:

- Continued monthly “Second Saturday” volunteer events in the Park.
- Celebrated the first ever California Biodiversity Day, September 7, 2019, in the Park.
- Began documenting flora and fauna in the Park by launching the “Biota of the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park” iNaturalist Project (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/biota-of-the-claremont-hills-wilderness-park>)
- Completed a proposal for improved Park Signage in the Park and submitted to the City.
- Continued documenting and mapping invasive plant species in the Park.
- Collaborated with Claremont Rotary Club and the City on a bike repair station.
- Collaborated with the City on a successful Cal Fire grant proposal.
- Initiated working with SOURCE (CMC student-run nonprofit consultants) on becoming a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.



SPECIFIC PROJECTS

Volunteers are currently engaged in four different areas:

(1) Second Saturday volunteer program, leader Vicki Salazar

The second Saturday volunteer program is a collaboration of the Friends of the Wilderness Park, CHWP Rangers, and City Staff. For four hours on the second Saturday of each month, Friends' volunteers:

- Answer questions about the Park.
- Provide directions (with a map that visitors can photograph).
- Remind visitors to take adequate water for themselves and their dogs.
- Give water and/or refillable water bottles (or a drink from a dog bowl) to those in need.
- Remind visitors to keep dogs on leashes and not play music out loud.
- Hike the loop, picking up trash and answering questions along the way.
- This year, we also asked visitors to complete user surveys.



From July 2019 through February 2020, we held **6** Second Saturday programs, in which we:

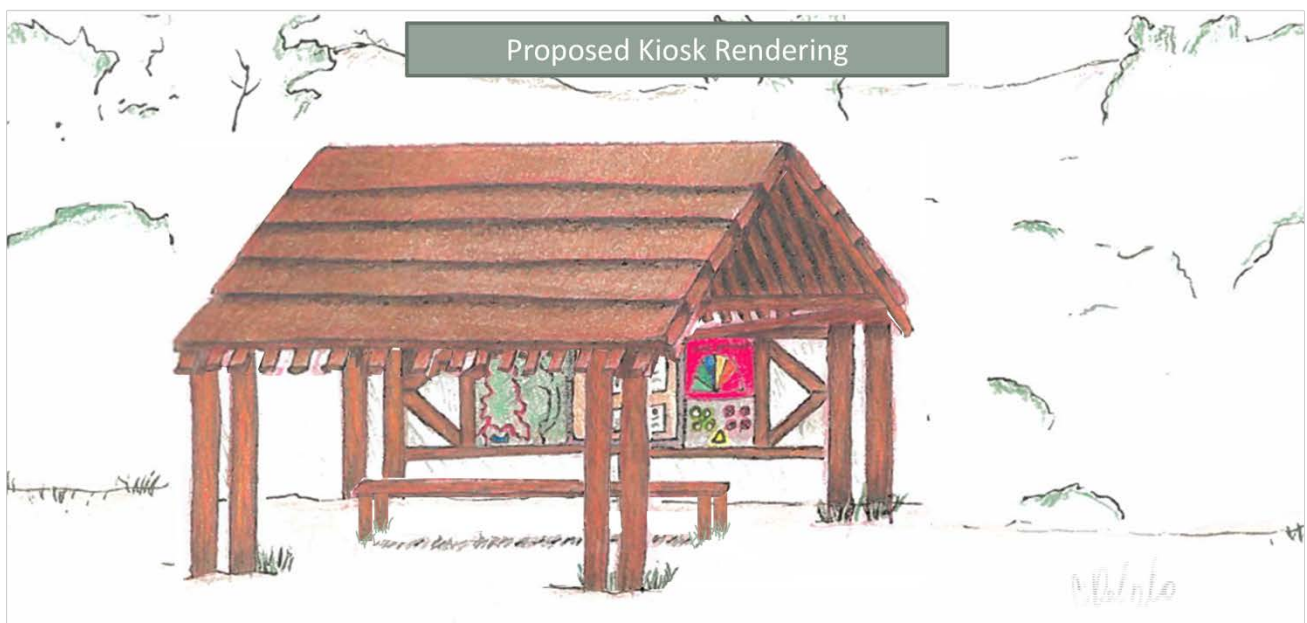
- Logged **134** volunteer hours
- Distributed **79** reusable water bottles
- Added **49** email addresses to the Friends volunteer list
- Collected **349** user surveys

(2) Park signage policies, leader Jim Pinter-Lucke

One of the recommendations in the CHWP *Master Plan* was to establish a new signage policy for the Park. It was noted that the Park is over-run with excessive signs in a variety of styles, installed at different times and with little attention to consistency or aesthetic taste. During this past year we completed and submitted to the City a draft of a policy that will bring greater clarity and aesthetic consistency to Park signage. One feature of our proposal is that it presents the possibility of implementing the plan in stages, as funding becomes available. This proposed policy will be brought before the Parks, Hillside, and Utilities Committee and Community and Human Services Commission in the near future.

Key elements of the policy include:

- A covered kiosk at the North Mills entrance containing a map-based sign and information about park hours and regulations
- Map-based/informational signs at all major access points.
- Uniform directional signs at trail junctions
- Mileage markers; useful as location indicators in cases of emergency



(3) Invasive species management, leader Nancy Hamlett

Invasive plant species degrade native habitat and displace native plants and wildlife, increase wildfire potential; increase slope erosion potential; and degrade recreational opportunities. Therefore, invasive plant species control and management are important components to preserving the integrity of CHWP's native habitat."

– Master Plan for the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park, Section 3.5.1, p 3-19

The Invasive Plant Working Group (IPWG), whose 14 members have extensive experience working with both native and invasive plants, is focusing on (1) identifying and mapping invasive plant species in the Park and (2) developing an Invasive Plant Management Plan. Progress this year includes:

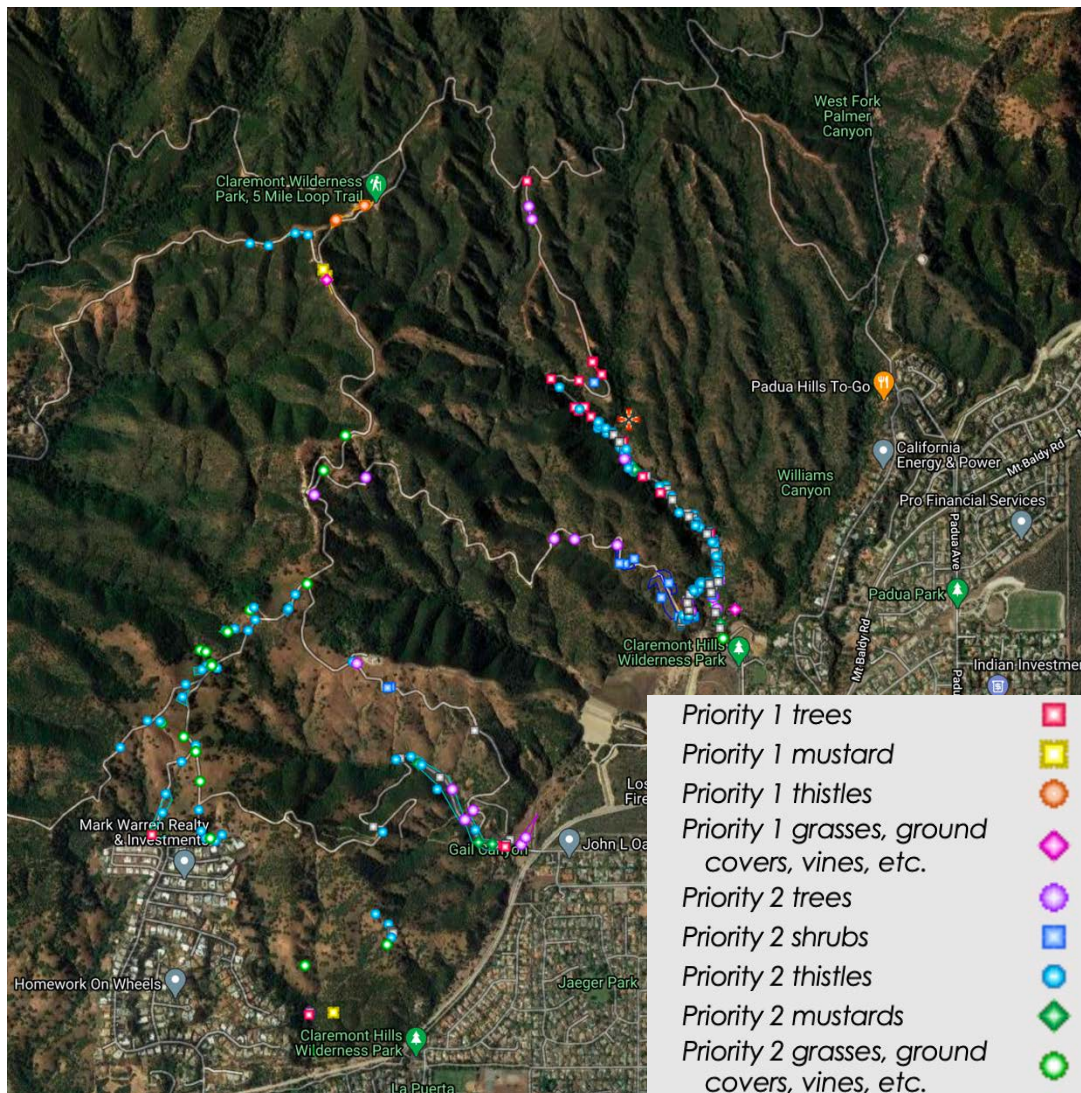
- *Mapping and identifying invasive plants in the Wilderness Park*

- This year we have documented 5 invasive plant species in addition to the 22 listed in the *Master Plan* (Table 3-2) and the 21 we had previously identified for a total of 48. More are likely to be found in the future.
- Using the CalFlora Observer Pro app, we have continued to map invasive plants in the Park, concentrating on those that are high priority for control. We have now mapped most of the Park, with the exceptions of Evey and Palmer Canyons.
- Mapping of invasive spring annuals was not possible this year because of Park closure.



Parkinsonia aculeata (Jerusalem Thorn)
One of the newly documented invasive plant species.

- *Development of an invasive species management plan*
 - Our draft plan has established priorities for removal:
 - **Priority 1:** Highly invasive but feasible to control.
 - **Priority 2:** Less invasive than priority 1 species and are feasible to control.
 - **Priority 3:** Invasive but too pervasive to control, except in special circumstances, for example, post-fire management or protection of endangered species or sensitive habitats.
 - **Early detection:** Invasive plant species that have not yet been observed at the Wilderness Park but are emerging threats in the region and may appear in the Park in the near future. If these species are observed, they would be shifted to Priority 1.
 - Further work on the Plan and any removal activities were put on hold because of COVID-19 restrictions.



(4) Documentation of Park flora and fauna, co-leaders Nancy Hamlett and Vicki Salazar

Effective management of the Park for conservation purposes requires understanding what flora and fauna, especially sensitive or protected species, are present in the Park. As a first step in formally documenting the flora and fauna of the Park, in August 2019 the Friends initiated the “Biota of the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park” community science project on the iNaturalist platform (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/biota-of-the-claremont-hills-wilderness-park>).



iNaturalist, a joint initiative by the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society, is an online community that allows naturalists all over the world to connect and share their observations. Users upload a picture (with location) of any wild plant, animal, or fungus, and iNaturalist’s image recognition software and other users help identify it. Our project is set up so that any observations made in the Wilderness Park are automatically added to our project.

We hope that that this project not only helps to document Park flora and fauna, but also helps to create community awareness of local biodiversity and promote a deeper connection to the local environment.

Here are a few stats from our first year of the project:

- **19** project members
- **130** contributors
- **354** species reported
 - **204** plants
 - **12** mammals
 - **40** birds
 - **11** reptiles
 - **3** amphibians
 - **81** insects
 - **6** spiders
 - **1** scorpion



Rare, threatened, and endangered species are of particular concern for developing management plans for the Park. Although our iNaturalist project is not optimal for detecting rare species, we have identified four that are listed in the the **California Natural Diversity Database**, an inventory of the status and locations of rare plants and animals in California maintained by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

- **Nevin's Barberry**
(*Berberis nevinii*)
Listed as Endangered under both the Federal and California Endangered Species Acts
- **Crotch's Bumblebee**
(*Bombus crotchii*)
Candidate for Endangered Species under the California Endangered Species Act
- **Plummer's Mariposa Lily**
(*Calochortus plummerae*)
Listed as Rare
- **Fragrant Pitcher Sage**
(*Lepechinia fragrans*)
Listed as Rare



Rare and Protected Species in the Wilderness Park.
Clockwise from top left: Nevin's Barberry (*Berberis nevinii*), female Crotch's Bumble Bee (*Bombus crotchii*), Plummer's Mariposa Lily (*Calochortus plummerae*), Fragrant Pitcher Sage (*Lepechinia fragrans*).



A male Crotch's Bumble Bee (*Bombus crotchii*) on Narrow-leaf Milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*) in Johnson's Pasture.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CITY:

- We recommend that the city carry out the past-due CHWP user survey required by the *Master Plan* as soon as possible. The data obtained from these surveys are essential for proper Park management and for applying for grants that could raise money for the Park. The Friends are willing and eager to help with engaging volunteers and helping to obtain whatever other resources are needed.
- We recommend that the City explore ways to initiate invasive plant species management, as recommended in the *Master Plan*. It is important to realize that inaction is in itself a management decision —one that does not maintain the status quo, but allows continued habitat degradation and deterioration of resources. Although the Friends are not currently permitted to have volunteer group activities, including invasive plant removal, the City could contract with professionals to attend to some of the worst problems. The Friends are happy to assist the City in developing a plan to move forward, strategies that could be employed, and raising funds for invasive plant management.



MANY THANKS TO:

Three Valleys Municipal Water District

for their donation of:

- Reusable water bottles

Golden State Water Company

for their donation of:

- Reusable water bottles
- Drinking water

Friends of the Wilderness Park Leadership Team

for their donations of:

- Pop-up canopy
- Drinking water
- Domain name, web hosting, and G-Suite renewal
- Reusable water bottles

